

## DESIGN

# For library, read room combination and hidden nooks



Neometro Architects' library nook in a Melbourne apartment.

When space is at a premium the books will have to share, writes **Stephen Crafti**.

A dedicated library is a rarity in contemporary homes, so many people face the problem of finding somewhere to store their books.

O'Connor + Houle Architecture (Stephen O'Connor and Annick Houle) incorporated a library into the living area of their own home in South Melbourne.

"We wanted to be able to access books quickly," O'Connor says. "We might be talking about something, and then go over to the shelves to illustrate a point." O'Connor and Houle live in the Melbourne house with their two young children.

One solution would have been to increase the amount of shelving in the mezzanine office overlooking the lounge, but they wanted the books closer at hand. The resulting library in the formal living area resembles a sculpture as much as a set of shelves. The shelves are made from steel and are set 200 millimetres apart. And the books appear to float under the generous five-metre high ceiling.

The shelves rest against translucent glass (German diamond frost) that also forms part of the front of the house.

"At night, the shelves are backlit," O'Connor says. "You can see the outline of the books from the street."

The firm of Walter Barda Architects regularly integrates libraries into living areas. For a new house in Bilgola, Sydney, the principal room is flanked by a courtyard on one side and a garden on the other.

There is a pitched ceiling with exposed rafters, and at one end of the room is a massive stone fireplace. At the other end is a library, with bookshelves and a desk.

"My client comes from north-east America," Walter Barda explains. "She wanted something that reminded her of the more traditional architecture that she left behind."

Hand-painted timber bookshelves feature exaggerated

DECEMBER 16-18 • 2005

THE AUSTRALIAN FINANCIAL REVIEW L19

columns and wide shelving. Made by bespoke joiner James Lee Warner, the bookshelves create additional texture in the contemporary-style home. They give the space depth and richness.

"When the guests arrive they can either warm themselves by the fire or browse through the bookshelves," Barda says. "People love to see what's on people's bookshelves, even if they don't remove a book."

Neometro Architects has included small library nooks in apartments that it has built in South Melbourne.

All seven apartments have libraries integrated into the main living spaces. In a one-bedroom apartment, the library and office space is concealed behind a large



timber sliding door.

"The owner has the option of screening the shelves or making them part of the living space," says architect Clare McAllister, one of four directors in the practice.

One of the two-bedroom apartments has a small study and library under the staircase. It also has a sliding door that allows books to be screened.

"We wanted to create a sense of warmth in the living area. It wasn't just about using the materials," she says, referring to the timber-clad

Right: "floating" library in South Melbourne; far right: bookshelves in Bilgola house.

walls and staircase. While a large and stately study may once have been the norm," she says, "today it's likely to be a fraction of the size and absorbed into the main living space".

"A large study in a large house is really a fantasy for most people. Few people have sufficient space. And if they do, it's not usually given over to a library."

